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Federal Investments In School Safety

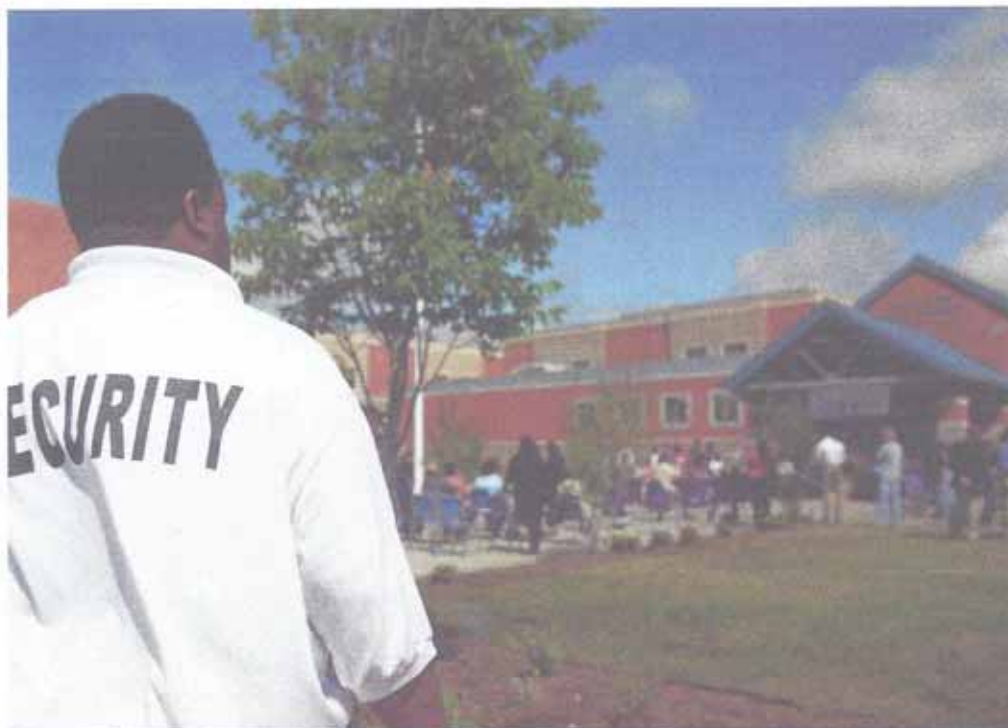
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Tragically, recent high-profile, multi-casualty school shootings have racked communities across the country and counties are searching for ways to respond to impassioned calls to enhance school security. At the federal level, there is a strong desire to prevent these heinous crimes, and increased funding for school safety programs has been appropriated to assist local governments, law enforcement agencies and mental health professionals.

Stop School Violence Act

When President Trump signed into law the 2018 Omnibus Spending Bill on March 23, 2018, the bill included key provisions for expanding K-12 school safety programs. Known as the Students, Teachers, and Officers Preventing (STOP) School Violence Act of 2018, this was the first federal school safety law to be enacted after the shooting in Parkland, Florida occurred in February. The act provides \$75 million in 2018 and \$100 million annually, from 2019-2028 for schools to add security systems, improve coordination with local law enforcement agencies and train students, teachers and police on identifying and preventing violence.

The funding will be split between two types of programs administered through the U.S. Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS). Funding will be divided in roughly 67% (BJA) to 33% (COPS) proportions annually. Cost sharing/matching components of both grants is anticipated to be 50% -- or dollar-for-dollar. Thus, the U.S. will see a total investment of nearly \$2 billion in school safety over the next 10 years.



ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

Key purpose areas for funding in the BJA and COPS Office programs are as follows:

1. The BJA is authorized to make grants for the following purposes:

- Training school personnel and students to prevent student violence against others and self.
- The development and operation of anonymous reporting systems for threats of school violence, including mobile telephone applications, hotlines, and Internet websites.
- The development and operation of –
 - School threat assessment and intervention teams that may include coordination with law enforcement agencies and school personnel; and specialized training for school officials in responding to mental health crises.
 - Any other measure that, in the determination of the BJA Director, may provide a significant improvement in training, threat assessments and reporting, and violence prevention.

2. The COPS office will provide grants to states and local governments as a revised version of the Secure Our Schools program, which ran from 2002 to 2011. It is authorized to make grants for the following purposes:

- Coordination with local law enforcement.
- Training for local law enforcement officers to prevent student violence against others and self.
- Placement and use of metal detectors, locks, lighting, and other deterrent measures.
- Acquisition and installation of technology for expedited notification of local law enforcement during an emergency.
- Any other measure that, in the determination of the COPS Director, may provide a significant improvement in security.

The bill expressly prohibits grant funding to firearms or firearm training to recipients – including firearms training for police officers, school resource officers, teachers, or school staff members. Further, it bans any of its provisions from being “construed to preclude or contradict” laws for firearms.

ELIGIBLE RECIPIENTS

States, local governments, and tribal organizations are eligible to apply for funding as prime recipients of the grant funding for any school safety projects. Local education agencies and non-profit organizations may apply as sub-recipients. K-12 schools may not receive grant funding directly. Therefore, education agencies will need to partner with local law enforcement or other eligible applicants for any grant-funded prevention activity. Higher education institutions are currently ineligible for funding under the STOP School Violence Act. Private schools, parochial schools, and exploratory charter schools without official LEA status also do not qualify.

According to statute, priority will be given to applicants that (1) demonstrate high need for improved security; and (2) demonstrate high need for financial assistance. BJA and COPS Office Directors will have discretion on the criteria for priority consideration.



APPROPRIATIONS FOR SCHOOL SAFETY

Congress is in the middle of finalizing funding for FY19 programs, but North Carolina counties can look at FY18 as a good indicator of where the money is flowing. According to the House Appropriations Committee summary, the FY18 Omnibus Appropriations bill funding for school safety provides more than \$2.3 billion in new funding for mental health, training, and school safety programs at the Departments of Justice, Education, and Health and Human Services “to help protect children and to promote safe learning environments.” This funding is as follows:

1. U.S. Department of Justice

Appropriations in FY18 increased resources for multiple programs to reduce violent and gun crime, in addition to the STOP School Violence Act described above. Funding in the Department of Justice for FY18 for these purposes is as follows:

- Fully funds the FBI’s National Instant Criminal Background Check System;
- Increases for U.S. Attorneys and the Marshals Service to address violent crime;
- \$10 million for the VALOR Initiative, which is police officer safety and wellness programs;
- \$10 million for the Police Act grants, which is for active shooter training for police;
- \$94 million for Youth Mentoring Grants, which are peer-to-peer mentoring for at-risk youth;
- \$20 million for Violent Crime and Gun Crime Reduction / Project Safe Neighborhoods, which are grants to reduce gang and gun violence; and
- \$4 million for Gang and Youth Violence Education and Prevention.

2. U.S. Department of Education

Appropriations in FY18 also increased resources to \$1.9 billion for the Department of Education to address school safety:

- \$90 million for school safety national activities that improve students’ safety and well-being during and after the school day;
- Continues funding the longstanding Project SERV program that provides counseling and referrals for mental health services for schools affected by violent or traumatic crisis; and



- \$1.1 billion for Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants that support safe and healthy students by providing flexible funds to states and school districts for school-based mental health services and supports, bullying and harassment prevention, mentoring and school counseling, and for professional development for school personnel in crisis management and school-based violence prevention strategies.

3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Additionally, FY18 appropriations were increased to \$205 million for the Department of Health and Human Services to address school safety:

- \$71 million for Project AWARE to provide state educational grants, grants to promote resilience in communities facing civil unrest, and mental health first aid grants;
- \$26 million for Healthy Transitions to provide grants to states to improve access to mental disorder treatment and support services for young people facing mental health conditions;
- \$13 million for Minority Fellowship program under the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to improve behavioral health care outcomes for racial and ethnic minority populations; and
- \$75 million to help expand the behavioral health workforce, including in rural and medically underserved areas, and increase access to child and adolescent services.

HOW FEDERAL GRANTS REACH COUNTIES

Federal grant funding to counties and other local government agencies typically comes in one of two sources: direct grants or pass-through grants. Direct funds go directly from the federal funding agency to local recipients. Pass-through grants are controlled by the states with timing, application procedures and the priorities the grant will fund varying on a state-by-state basis. States still have to apply for the grant and most states also often keep a portion to cover administrative costs. Some state grants will also be reserved for funding statewide projects. North Carolina counties should contact the appropriate state agencies to find out more about any grants described above that make states eligible in order to determine if the county can work with the state to get the county's needs funded. ■